

# Crispus Attucks

c. 1723–1770



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Crispus Attucks was an escaped slave whose actions during the Boston Massacre made him a symbol of freedom.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Crispus Attucks's courage during the Boston Massacre served as an example for those fighting for independence.*



Library of Congress

“Don’t be afraid,” were the words reportedly spoken by Crispus Attucks shortly before his death. Killed in the infamous Boston Massacre in 1750, Attucks is believed by many to be the first **casualty** in the fight for American independence.

Crispus Attucks was born in Massachusetts, the son of an African father and an American Indian mother. Because of his heritage, Attucks was born a slave. He was owned by William Brown. Attucks longed to be free. When Brown would not allow him to purchase his freedom, he ran away. An ad was posted for Attucks, describing him as “6 feet, 2 inches high, short cur’l hair, his knees nearer together than common.” His master never found him.

In the years following his escape, Attucks worked as a sailor, commonly serving on whaling ships that sailed from Boston. It was while living near Boston Harbor that Attucks heard the rallying cries of fellow patriot, Samuel Adams. Adams wanted the colonists to protest the presence of the British troops. He felt the British were a threat to the colonists. Attucks agreed with Adams’s point of view. He and

## VOCABULARY

**casualty** someone injured or killed in a military engagement

**impressment** the act of forcing someone into government service

other colonists had to compete with the British for the part-time jobs at the harbor. They also feared **impressment**, or forced service, in the British navy.

On the evening of March 5, 1770, Attucks and a group of men faced-off with a British soldier on guard at the house of customs. They challenged the soldier to fight without his weapon. More Redcoats rushed to the defense of the guard. They fired shots into the unarmed crowd. Attucks was the first man killed. Four more men were also killed. Known as the Boston Massacre, this event was one of the most important in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Led by Attucks, the colonists had stood strong against the British.

Crispus Attucks was given an honorable funeral with the other victims of the Boston Massacre. The people of Boston remembered him as a hero and a freedom fighter. In 1888, a monument was built on the Boston Common to honor Attucks.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**1. Drawing Conclusions** Why did the people of Boston hail Attucks as a hero?

---

---

**2. Evaluate** Do you think Crispus Attucks was the first casualty of the American Revolution? Explain your answer.

---

---

### ACTIVITY

**3.** Imagine that you have been given the honor of writing an epitaph for Crispus Attucks. What would you say? Be creative.